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SUBJECT: UN - GA NEGATES AUDITORS RECOMMENDATION ON USE OF  
WORKING LANGUAGES

11. Summary: Following extensive negotiations in the Fifth Committee on the report of the UN Board of Auditors (BOA) during the main part of the 63rd GA, the General Assembly rejected the recommendation in the BOA report on "language proficiency." Adoption of the recommendation would have made fluency in both English and French a requirement for new staff members at the professional level and above. End Summary.

12. The BOA, chaired in 2007-2008 by French national Philippe Seguin, argued in paragraphs 259 and 260 of its report on the financial report and audited financial statements for the biennium ended 31 December 2007 - Vol. I United Nations (A/63/5 (Vol.I)) that:

-- the Assembly, in GA resolution 2 (I) of 1 February 1946, decided that the two working languages of the Secretariat - French and English - must be "treated equally",

-- since proficiency in English is considered "indispensable", whereas proficiency in French appears only to be "desirable", recruitment leads to almost all of the staff having a mastery of English with only a minority speaking French, and that consequently work is carried out largely in English "in violation of the General Assembly resolution" and that

-- the Secretariat should "require fluency in both languages" for the candidates it recruits.

13. In paragraphs 261 and 262, the BOA recommended that the GA should decide to make it a requirement for new staff members at the professional level and above who are not fluent in both working languages of the Secretariat to undergo language tutoring upon joining the Organization and that the Secretariat should test the fluency in both working languages of all new entrants at the professional level and above after a period of time following their entry on duty. The Secretariat estimated that implementing the recommendations would have cost approximately \$3 million per biennium.

14. USDel argued that:

-- use of the working languages is a matter of practicality,

-- the rules and regulations, derived from article 101 of the Charter and all relevant GA resolutions, do not require "equal" or "balanced" use of English and French in the day-to-day work of the Secretariat,

-- adoption of the BOA's recommendation would have the effect of discriminating against candidates whose mother tongue is not English or French, and that

-- consideration of recommendations possibly changing the Organization's human resources rules and regulations should be considered under the HR item in the Fifth Committee so that all possible implications could be considered.

¶5. After extensive and sometimes contentious discussions with the French delegation, the following three paragraphs were included in the draft resolution adopted by the GA - A/C.5/63/L.8 (to be issued as resolution 63/246). Their inclusion has the effect of neutralizing the recommendations in the BOA report by placing the issue in its proper HR context:

"Recalling further all its resolutions related to the languages of the United Nations as well as on human resources management,"

"Emphasizing the need to ensure the full implementation of the staff regulations and rules of the United Nations,"

"Stresses that the employment of staff shall continue to be carried out in strict accordance with article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations and in line with the relevant provisions of the General Assembly resolutions;"  
Wolff